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Coming into teaching this year, I thought my biggest strengths were a passion for teaching, coming up with creative approaches to learning, and being able to make group connections. Since I was to work at a 100% immigrant school, I thought that my overseas experiences in teaching English would benefit my teaching. As the semester has worn on, however, I don't think I realized many of my strengths as a teacher until they were pointed out to me by my colleagues, supervisor, and professor.

I found early on that I questioned my passion for teaching. Certainly, I enjoyed it, but not all aspects of it. This semester has been a discovery of exactly what I am passionate about and what I want nothing to do with. First of all, I love project-based learning. I like to teach through concepts and see how my students interpret those concepts. Secondly, I thrive from an informal classroom setting. I like to have space for my students to move, sit, and discuss. I like to bring up current events or discuss what is happening in the school climate so everyone in the classroom stays informed. Third, I tend to focus on social justice issues and have found a way to integrate them into the curriculum. As for aspects of teaching I am not nearly as fond of, I think grading, constantly reminding students of things, and helping students get past their personal "junk" and into an academic mindset are at the top.

I am certainly able to come up with creative approaches to teaching and learning. I try to incorporate reading, writing, speaking, and listening into all the projects the students are a part of, but have students explore those aspects of language creatively. I have introduced drama, music, poetry, storyboarding, and film into the classroom. Because the world is going paperless, I have set up an interactive, password-protected website where students can read and submit their assignments. There is also a multi-media blog the students contribute to once per semester. This has been a great success for students who like technology, for those whose handwriting I have trouble deciphering, and acts as a forum for students to post comments and questions to me and other classmates. Students participated in the TDF Stage Doors program that brought two teaching artists into the classroom to prepare classes to see a Broadway production.

Students wrote, acted, and sang. They learned about each other's coming of age stories, which created a bridge to our first class novel about a boy coming of age during the U.S. Civil War. Students were required to write a persuasive essay (as per the instructions left by the teacher I am replacing---she is on maternity leave), so I looked for ways to make it more meaningful and relevant. I discovered the National Writing Project and their project for this year---having students write and post letters to the next president. I had students brainstorm the most important issues they thought the next president should deal with. They then researched their issues and wrote persuasive essays to the next president, which are posted online.

I have no fear speaking in front of groups. I find this a strength in the classroom when there is confusion, dissent, or a perfect time for large group discussion. I am able to answer questions thoughtfully and thoroughly when they are presented, and find creative ways of directing students to discover their own answers. I know words and phrases to use to change the morale of a group. For example, when it came time for the senior trip, only a third of students were going. Those "left behind" were going to have to go to school the first day the others were on the trip. I so cleverly introduced the idea of an open work day, students who were going on the trip wanted to stay! I promised them some study time on the trip.

I was surprised to learn that my tone, ability to elicit response, and one-on-one connection skills were strengths I possessed. I have been working quite a while to improve my tone. I used to have little ability to decipher tone. I couldn't read it from other people and I didn't understand how my own tone could affect others. After observing a teacher friend of mine, I realized that tone was extremely important and I needed to understand and use it purposefully. Though I have been working on it, I had no idea that it had become a strength. I was pleasantly surprised when my supervisor pointed out that I had excellent tone.

I love asking questions, but never knew it would become a strength in the classroom. I ask questions when they come to my head. In other words, I don't have to do too much planning when it comes to asking good questions. I now realize the importance of asking good questions to my students and that student responses can serve as evaluation of understanding.

I never favored my one-on-one connection skills. Connecting to my students was actually something I was dreading. I don't make friends easily; I typically admire people from afar. Making connections, I thought, would be an extreme challenge for me. As it turned out, I have been able to make several one-on-one connections without having to put in too much effort! Certainly there are still many students I don't know well, but that will be the case anywhere I work. I have found I can converse easily with the majority of students and try to find common ground or at least an understanding of where they're coming from.

My strengths have certainly played out through my lessons and in working with students. As I mentioned before, my creativity had led to several purposeful projects. Right now my students are preparing for book presentations. I gave them eight choices, each of which had a reading component (the book itself), writing (a reflection, connections, and justification---things we scaffolded in the beginning of the semester), speaking (the presentation itself), and listening (small and large group discussions). Each project has a visual as well (drawing, illustrating, photograph manipulation, etc.). I hope to help guide my students through the Progressive Era with their novels and allow them to show what they have learned through creative presentations.

Apparently my tone has a large effect on my students. My students are not afraid to ask me questions, are attentive when I ask them to be, and are rarely surprised by my words or actions. They know what to expect because of my routine demeanor. I have tried to set up a calm atmosphere of learning where all ideas are respected. Because the classroom operates in this manner, students have been unafraid to share personal experiences, try out new words, question others' decisions, and present in front of the class.

As for areas I need to work on, the first is organization of my objectives. I need to write more clear objectives for each lesson. If I ask myself, "what is the most important thing the students need to know/learn/understand?", I can design better lessons and evaluations of those lessons. It will become more clear to me and the students as to what I am looking for. I can more easily evaluate if students "got it" or not. As of now, I often have too many objectives and goals in mind. Sometimes I feel that a project or lesson has failed because the students didn't learn everything. If I narrow my focus and

move step by step, more students will be able to reach objectives and I will have a greater understanding on how to properly scaffold skills.

The second area I need to work on is my fear of teaching hard skills. I need to prioritize hard skills (grammar, sentence structure, etc.) and balance them with soft skills (group building, communication, etc.). I need to find a way to determine which hard skills to teach and how to teach them. I realize that teaching hard skills is important, but I just don't know how to do it. I think I am uncertain of my own skills, so I find it hard to teach them.

The third area I need to work on is asking others for support. I have so many resources around me---NYU professors, teacher friends, other teachers at the school where I work---but I don't use them as often as I should. I am not an expert and can't expect every lesson I plan to come out perfectly. Instead of figuring out what to do on my own, I need to ask questions and listen in on other peoples' lessons. I have a lot to learn from people who have been teaching a long time. I also have no idea about some of the things I need to learn! I learn that I am lacking because I see another teacher with an effective practice! This semester, I have found the more I ask questions, the better my classroom becomes. I wish I had done this earlier! I was lost at the beginning of the semester---I knew something was missing from my classroom, but I didn't know what. After I had been observed several times and asked questions of some of my teacher friends, I realized I was missing clear objectives and dedicated writing time in my classroom. I feel that the classroom runs much more smoothly after implementing "master teacher" suggestions.

I have certainly worked well with the staff at this school. I have had productive grade level team meetings where I have felt my thoughts and ideas have value. I have been a part of exciting pedagogical discussions at discipline meetings. Occasionally I have filled in for staff at professional development meetings where I have increased my knowledge about English Language Learners and fulfilling the needs of the students at this school. In the future, I see myself working on a team-oriented staff that discusses strategies for helping students who are struggling and provides proper praise for those who are doing well. I wish to take on a larger leadership role in a committee for the

benefit of the student population. I also hope to work to build staff relationships for cross-curricular collaboration.

I will be interviewing for new jobs soon. From my experience at Brooklyn International, I will be sure to mention my work with struggling students and English Language Learners. I will also discuss my ability to design structured creative projects that assess all elements of language. My experience working on a team to design cross-curricular projects will also support my candidacy. But overall, I need to find a job where I feel comfortable (a school that supports creative learning) and where I can learn (a school with multiple teachers on a grade level).